Bold, V. (1994) James Hogg and the Scottish self-taught tradition. In: Goodridge, J. (ed.) The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition. John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, Helpston, UK, pp. 69-86. ISBN 9780952254126

Pope foresees a future of rural peace and plenty for all, and this social vision is implicit in the generous enthusiasm of Thomson's *The Seasons*, that mid-century report on the health of the nation. But by the time Bloomfield was writing *May Day with the Muses* it was a widely-protested scandal that those who controlled the harvests withheld through their cornlaws bread from the poor. Bloomfield doesn't mention the hated cornlaws but that he should set his poem in the past and once again focus on *old* people makes it inevitable that we should read *May Day with the Muses* as an elegy for a lost way of life, a vision of mutuality long faded, one that relied on kinship, trusted relations rooted in place. Whether he believed that a way of life in which all could rejoice in deep harvests had ever truly existed, at all events in quite the uninflected manner his poems suppose, I don't know. Probably not. But anyway this matters less than his asserting the value of 'local tales', of local language, and of those social arrangements in which there could be no room for disdain or timid glances or refinement's hated face, and in which a *shared* abundance could be taken for granted. No wonder Clare so admired him.

NOTES

1. This and other quotations are taken from 'The Life of Robert Bloomfield', which introduces the 1867 edition of *The Works of Robert Bloomfield*, published by George Routledge and Sons. The 'Life' contains numerous quotations from George Bloomfield's memoir, including the above, and from Capel Lofft, Bloomfield's patron.
2. For this see David Worrall's *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1795–1820* (1983).
3. John Lucas, *John Clare* (Plymouth: Northcote House, Writers and Their Work Series, 1994).
4. Alun Howkins and Ian Dyck, '"The Time's Alterations": Popular Ballads, Rural Radicals and William Cobbett', *History Workshop*, 23 (Spring 1987).
5. John Lucas, 'Wordsworth and the Anti-Picturesque', *Romantic to Modern*, 1982.

The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition. Helpston John Clare Society 1994

James Hogg and the Scottish self taught tradition

Valentina Bold

I'd like to start by quoting a letter from Clare to Allan Cunningham, 'the Nithsdale Mason', a very close friend of 'The Ettrick Shepherd', James Hogg. Addressing his 'Brother Bard and Fellow Labourer' in 1824 Clare observed:

> ...the 'Ettrick Shepherd,' 'The Nithsdale Mason,' and 'The Northamptonshire Peasant,' are looked upon as intruders and stray cattle in the fields of the Muses... Well, never mind, we will do our best, and as we never went to Oxford or Cambridge, we have no Latin and Greek to boast of, and no bad translations to hazard (whatever our poems may be), and that's one comfort on our side. (*Letters*, p. 303)

Clare, then, identified a cross-border community of poets categorised by their supposedly humble occupations. The 'Oxford / Cambridge' reference is particularly ironic, as self education was usually equated with ignorance. In David Masson's 'College-Education and Self-Education' (1854), 'self-educated men—of course, I except the higher and more illustrious instances—do not, as a body, exhibit the same tenacity and perseverance in pushing knowledge to its farthest limits as academic men'.[1] Today, I'll be exploring Clare's observation that self taught, or 'peasant' poets were excluded from the critical mainstream. To show the significance of being considered a peasant poet, I'll then focus on James Hogg (1770–1835), Clare's older contemporary. I've chosen to concentrate on Hogg because of time restrictions, as well as his creative affinities with Clare. Clare's *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827), for instance, shares themes with Hogg's prose series of the same title, in *Blackwood's Magazine* between 1818 and 1828.

The Scottish self taught poets' experience shows striking parallels with the English. Although Clare contributed to his stereotyping as 'a lowly Clown' he wrote to John Taylor in 1820, regarding proposed cuts in 'Helpstone': 'd__n that canting way of being forcd to please I

say—I can't abide it & one day or other I will show my Independance' (*Letters*, p. 69). Similarly, while using the sobriquet 'Ettrick Shepherd' himself, Hogg baulked at Scott's suggestion he should stop writing and stick to farming. However, the democratic tradition North of the Border seems to have accorded the peasant poet at least models for poetic expression. Scottish literature has consistently shown interest in the impoverished from novels like *The Provost* (1822) to *The Scots Quair* (1932–34). While in England, there seems to have been a broken tradition of autodidacticism—H. Gustav Klaus's study of *The Literature of Labour* (1985) has already argued this—in Scotland there is a continuous tradition of self taught writing which stretches from the eighteenth well into the present century, from 'the Scotch milkmaid' Janet Little (1759–1819) to the Dundee baillie James Young Geddes (1859–1913). I wouldn't, however, go as far as to say that Scottish society proved a belief 'a man's a man for a' that'. Robert Fergusson's (1750–74) success in vernacular idioms did not protect him from a similar fate to Clare's: Fergusson died penniless in an Edinburgh madhouse, ignored by the literati.[2]

The prototype Scottish peasant poet was Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725): a neo-classical pastoral songster. James Macpherson's Ossian added a Celtic twist to this image. The ethnically pure mountain poet of *Temora* (1763) was a national figure who could be viewed with nostalgia; attractive to contemporary sensibilities. Definitions of primitive poetry like Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753) suggested the self taught poet should produce melancholic, pastoral pieces. As the *Scots Magazine* of 1819 remarked, 'humour...requires a certain polish and refinement which unlettered bards can scarcely have had an opportunity of acquiring'. The use of Scots was discouraged, associated with an inferior vernacular culture. Thomas Sheridan's *A Course of Lectures in Education* (1762) observed that, apart from London court speech, 'dialects, are sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, pedantic, or mechanic education: and therefore have some degree of disgrace attached to them'.[3]

The idea of peasant poetry gelled in Scotland with Henry Mackenzie's appreciation of Burns in *The Lounger* of 1786. Mackenzie neglected the writer's considerable knowledge of literary tradition, from Pope, Shakespeare and Locke, to Ramsay and Fergusson, presenting Scotland with her 'heaven-taught ploughman'. Discouraging Burns's poetry in Scots, preference was given to 'almost English' pieces like 'The Vision' and 'To a Mountain Daisy' (*Poems*, 62, 92). Burns actively, if ambivalently, collaborated as 'A Professor

of the Belles Lettres de la Nature' (*Letters*, i, 66), and the pious family of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (Poems, 72) became peasant poet icons. However, the poet of 'For a' that and a' that' (*Poems*, 482) was not wholly comfortable with being defined as a rustic naif. 'The Twa Dogs' (*Poems*, 71) manipulates the idea the lowly canine is more astute than its master: 'for *human bodies* are sic fools, / For a' their Colleges and Schools' (lines 195–6). This peasant poet could turn and snap the patron's hand.[4]

After Burns's death, the myth gained fuel. James Currie's biography in *The Works of Robert Burns* (1800) has Burns as representative Scottish peasant: industrious and committed to the lyric tradition. James Montgomery, Clare's correspondent, commented insensitively in the *Eclectic Review* of 1809:

> It was probably fortunate for Burns, that by a partial education his mind was only cleared of the forests, and drained of the morasses ...higher cultivation would unquestionably have called forth richer and fairer harvests, but it would have so softened away the wild and magnificent diversity.[5]

Alexander Peterkin's *Review of the Life of Robert Burns* (1815) disliked Currie's Burns as 'poetic prodigy, on a level with Stephen Duck, and Thomas Dermody; men, the glimmering of whose genius are extinct'. Peterkin's sources include David Gray, friend of Burns and Hogg's brother-in-law. Perhaps Gray offered the peasant persona to the Ettrick Shepherd. Hogg's *Memoir* of Burns, Vol. V of *The Works of Robert Burns* (1839) co-edited by William Motherwell, stereotypically presented Burns as: 'of all men...the most exposed to erratic wanderings, but without whose strong passions and ardent feelings, he could never have been the splendid meteor of our imagination'.[6]

James Hogg, 'The Ettrick Shepherd', was well qualified to inherit Burns's mantle as national peasant poet. His background was similar to Clare's. Born in the Scottish Borders in 1770, Hogg was hired out at seven as a full-time cow herd and spent the next ten years ascending to the rank of shepherd. He had only six months' formal schooling, however his family were multi-talented tradition bearers. His grandfather, Will o' Phaup, was a skilled singer and tale-teller, much of whose repertoire was transmitted to his son William and daughter Margaret Laidlaw, Hogg's mother. From the age of fourteen Hogg, like Clare, played the fiddle, and his knowledge of folk music was to prove a profound poetic source. Just as Clare read 'everything

he could get his hands on', as Carolyn Kizer recently commented, so the Ettrick Shepherd made full use of his access to his employers', the Laidlaws, libraries at Willenslee and, from 1790, at Blackhouse. There he read major Scottish works, including Hamilton of Gilbertfield's version of Blind Hary's *The Wallace* (1722), and *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725); attractive personae for the young poet. Hogg claimed to find Scots poetry incomprehensible, but when a 'half daft man, named John Scott' recited 'Tam o' Shanter', the Shepherd resolved 'to be a poet, and to follow in the steps of Burns'. Hogg initiated a literary society with other shepherds; his early pieces earned Hogg the nickname 'Jamie the Poeter'.[7]

Much of the evidence about Hogg's early years comes from his 'Memoirs' of 1807 and 1821, and these should be approached with caution: Hogg was actively developing the Ettrick Shepherd persona. For instance, he complies with nineteenth-century desires to have the peasant poet struggle to fame; describing writing poetry on stitched sheets of paper, with ink fastened to his waistcoat, and a 'singular' manner of composition:

> Let the piece be of what length it will, I compose and correct it wholly in my mind, or on a slate, ere ever I put pen to paper; and then I write it down as fast as the A, B, C. When once it is written, it remains in that state.8

Hogg's first collection, *Scottish Pastorals* (1801), was, he claimed, a spur of the moment decision, printed off while he was at market. It consists largely of lyrics: songs of 'the passions' were seen as quintessentially Scottish at this period; after Burns, particularly suitable for peasants. Most *Pastorals* are derivative. 'Willie and Katie, A pastoral', for instance, reworks love themes in *The Gentle Shepherd*. Hogg claims to be a lyric poet from experience, like Burns: 'My acquaintances hereabouts imagine, that the pastoral of *Willie an' Keatie*... was founded on an amour of mine own. I cannot say that their surmises are entirely groundless'.[9]

Meeting Scott in 1802, through the collection project of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3) had major repercussions for Hogg. Scott became quasi-patron, attempting to win financial support for Hogg from the Scotts of Buccleuch (the poet became tenant of Altrive in 1814, after the Duchess's death, paying only for the use of the mosses). However, references in Scott's *Journal* to the 'swinish' productions of the 'boar' of Ettrick suggest ambivalence in the Hogg / Scott association. Their sometimes stormy relationship is symptomatic of problems faced by self taught poets.[10]

Hogg sought pre-publication advice from Scott for his next publication, *The Mountain Bard* (1807); the title has Ossianic resonances:

> Dear sir,
> I received yours brimfull of criticisms, articles which I mortally abhor... You are by this time sensible that it will never be from correctness and equality that I am to depend on for my poetic character but only from scattered expressive tints...it is only from a conviction that if one man in Britain have a proper discernment in that species of poetry it is you that I am induced to listen at all... I think now that you were right in blotting out my early poetry from the preface which however I only meant to appear as an instance of the progress of *genious* [sic]... I positively will not have them printed without apostrophes as yours and Leyden's are. I think there should be only four stanzas in the page though I do not like a very large type. If you have not published the proposals note that the book must be of a large size as there are yet a number of ballads I mean to insert.

This blend of wanting help and resenting it is highly understandable, given the peasant poet's position towards self-styled social superiors. Clare, too, was irritated by Scott's refusal to sign his presentation copy of *The Lady of the Lake* in 1820 (see Clare-Sherwill, 12 July 1820, *Letters*, p. 86).[11]

The Mountain Bard opens in retrospective mood: 'Fain would I hear our mountains ring / With blasts which former minstrels blew'. This tone is sustained through ballad imitations like 'Sir David Graeme' and stark lyrics like 'The Moon was a-Waning'. The reader is involved in a conspiracy: aware of the lover's death when the beloved is not. Hogg had learnt from ballads that sorrow implied is doubly powerful:

> Soft was the bed
> She had made for her lover;
> White were the sheets,
> And embroidered the cover.
> But his sheets are more white,
> And his canopy grander,
> And sounder he sleeps
> Where the hill foxes wander. (lines 9–16)

An anonymous *Athenaeum* reviewer commented, 'In all the wide compass of song, there is nothing more softly affecting, or more poetically sad, than these four verses'.[12] Hogg drew on a similar passage on a man lost in the snow in the 'Winter' section of *The Seasons* (1726–30):

> In vain for him the officious wife prepares
> The fire fair-blazing, and vestment warm,
> In vain his little children, peeping out
> Into the mingling storm, demand their sire,
> With tears of artless innocence. Alas!
> Nor wife, nor children, more shall behold,
> Nor friends, nor sacred home. On every nerve,
> The deadly Winter seizes; shuts up sense;
> And, o'er his inmost vitals, creeping cold,
> Lays him along the snows a stiffened corpse—
> Stretched out, and bleaching in the northern blast.
> (lines 314–21)

While appreciating Hogg's 'pathetic' poetry, some critics were ambivalent. the *Monthly Review* noticed an improvement in Hogg's language in *The Mountain Bard*: 'less at variance with the rules of good taste... he does not seek a refuge, as it were, in the obscurities of his native dialect'. Such sniping became commonplace, even from Allan Cunningham, Hogg's friend since 1806, who knew what it was like to be considered a peasant 'sumph'. In the *Athenaeum* of 1833 Cunningham called his fellow Borderer, 'Chief of the peasant School... which more than approaches that of the polished and learned' but condemned the 'homeliness of language, which ought to be tolerated in the minstrel but not endured in modern song'.[13]

Lyrics were consistently Hogg's most popular pieces. Clare appreciated 'When the kye comes hame', and wrote to Thomas Pringle in July 1831, 'I saw a Song of Hoggs in a newspaper [*The Stamford Chronicle*] this spring "When the Kye comes home" which delighted me it is the sweetest pastoral I have seen for many a day' (*Letters*, p. 543). This was originally an interlude, 'The Sweetest Thing The best Thing' in Chapter XXI of *The Three Perils of Man* (1822), reprinted in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1823), and *Songs* (1831). It is set to 'Shame fa' the gear and the blathrie o't'. Critics loved 'The Kye': Moir thought it one of Hogg's best, for 'pastoral delicacy'.[14]

It is traditional-style lyric when the text stands alone. However, in the original context this was parodic. 'The poet', Colley Carol, 'fixing his eyes on the ceiling, and clasping his hands, which he

heaved up at every turn of the tune', sang:

> Come tell me a' you shepherds
> That love the tarry woo',
> And tell me a' you jolly boys
> That whistle at the plow,
> What is the greatest bliss
> That the tongue of man can name,
> 'Tis 'to woo a bonny lassie
> When the kye come hame.' (lines 1–8)

No shepherd sincerely loves the 'tarry woo', the result of October's smearing, to protect sheep from the winter snow. Even the feared *Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818) is welcome to this messy task. Ironically, too, the poet of *Perils of Man* could only recollect seven of his supposed sixteen verses: 'Since I came to the top of this cursed tower, the wind has blown it out of my head'.[15]

In the *Blackwood's* and *Songs* version the content and verse order is changed. The opening is now:

> Come all ye jolly shepherds
> That whistle through the glen,
> I'll tell ye of a secret
> That courtiers dinna ken (lines 1–4)

Hogg claimed in a tongue-in-cheek note:

> when the "Three Perils of man" came first to my hand and I saw this song put in the mouth of a drunken poet, and mangled in the singing, I had no recollection of it whatever... But I liked it, altered it, and it has been my favourite pastoral for singing ever since.[16]

The song progresses in standard lyric fashion; in verse second 'the burgonet...the crown...the couch of velvet' are all inferior to 'the spreading birch / In the dell without the name' where the sensible man will lie with his 'bonny bonny lassie, / When the kye come hame'. The *Songs* version omits the clumsy-sounding 'burgonet' substituting the formal 'coronet'. 'Crown' becomes the elevated 'canopy of state'.

The third and fourth stanzas of the original deal with one of Hogg's favourite themes: the untroubled bird, here a blackbird, elsewhere 'The Lark'.[17] It recalls Thomson's birdsong in 'Spring': 'Tis love creates their melody' (line 614). Verse four of the original becomes six in later versions, which have a new fourth stanza

referring to 'blewart [cornflower]', 'daisy' and 'bonny lucken gowan [daisy]' for local colour. The first four lines of the fifth stanza in the original and *Blackwood's*, describing love (when 'the eye shines sae bright / The hale soul to beguile') are omitted in the *Songs* but, intriguingly, the next four beginning 'O wha wad chuse a crown / Wi' its perils and its fame' reappear as the second four lines of the last stanza of *Songs*.

Critics could voyeuristically enjoy the appropriate pastoral (for a peasant poet) of 'Verse the Fifteenth' (fifth in the *Songs*): a 'pawky shepherd' whose 'heart is in a flame' for his lassie. The last stanza reiterates that no wealth is worth the love of a bonny lassie. In the *Songs* 'Away wi' fame and fortune, / What comfort can they gie' (lines 58–9) becomes:

> Then since all nature joins
> In this love without alloy,
> O wha wad prove a traitor
> To Nature's dearest joy? (lines 58–61)

So the sentiments are made more elevated. There are linguistic changes too in the *Songs*:

> I choose rather to violate a rule in grammar, than a Scottish phrase so common, that when it is altered into the proper way, every shepherd and shepherd's sweetheart account it nonsense. I was once singing it at a wedding with great glee the latter way, ("when the kye come hame,") when a tailor, scratching his head, said, "it was a terrible affectit way!" I stood corrected, and have never sung it so again.[18]

On occasion, then, Hogg claims Scots' loyalties win over English. A different motive for change can be seen in the second stanza where 'birch' becomes 'birk' and 'dell', 'glen'. These are 'Scotch' sounding after the 'Scotch' songs popularised by Thomas D'Urfey and Allan Ramsay in the eighteenth century. Hogg, then, complies with literary and oral demands, pleasing both his publics. Incidentally, several of his songs were set by classical artists including Haydn and Beethoven.[19]

Hogg's breakthrough publication was *The Queen's Wake* (1813), a song cycle for Mary Queen of Scots on her return to Scotland in 1561, performed over three successive nights; similar to the courtly *Decameron*. Comic and serious pieces are interspersed. 'The Witch of Fife' is a self-sufficient housewife, in the tradition of Dunbar's

'Tua Mariit Wemen'. Her husband pursues her on a night raid to Carlisle, and passes out drunk. Found by the bishop's men, he is pricked till his blood flows ('but some cryit it was wine') and tied to the stake to be burnt. At the last moment the Witch rescues her husband and a moral is drawn:

> May ever ilke man in the land of Fyfe,
> Read what drinkeris dree;
> And nevir curse his puir auld wife,
> Rychte wicked altho she be. (stanza 80)

Douglas Gifford comments on the 'ballad toughness of tone' in 'The Witch of Fife', particularly apt in relation to the first version where the old man was burnt at the stake.[20] Scott convinced Hogg to change the original harsh ending and save the old man, making the poem attractive to sensitive literary audiences but detracting from its integrity. Such interference exemplifies contemporary attitudes to peasant, and oral, poetry: acceptable if shorn of offensive characteristics.

Satirising critical responses, *The Wake* includes reductive commentary. 'Drumlanrig' is 'soothing' but 'Too long, too varied'; the visionary 'Kilmeny' is received by ladies who yawn, with 'drumly eyes', recalling responses Hogg sometimes suffered with legendary material. Hogg presents himself in the poem as a peasant bard nursed 'In Nature's bosom' in Ettrick:

> The ladies smiled, the courtiers sneered;
> For such a simple air and mien
> Before a court had never been.
> A clown he was, bred in the wild,
> And late from native moors exiled,
> In hopes his mellow mountain strain
> High favour from the great would gain.
> Poor wight! he never weened how hard
> For poverty to earn regard! (Night II)

Contemporaries are profiled too. Gardyn, overall winner, is reminiscent of Byron, high ranking with an emblematic rose beneath a thistle. In thinner disguise is Cunningham, Nithsdale bard. The bard of Ettrick wins a harp made by a wizard, whose former owners include Bangour but not Ramsay ('His was some lyre from lady's hall', line 286), John Leyden and Walter the Abbot (Scott). *The Wake*, which opened with Hogg's 'Mountain Lyre', ends with a farewell; in the spring Hogg will seek his harp again. As reads Hogg's epitaph, by St. Mary's Loch, this harp 'taught the wandering wings to sing'.

The *Edinburgh Review* saw in *The Wake*: 'an occasional exaltation of fancy... [which] brings him now and then to the borders of a very high species of poetry—though, we think, from his frequent lapses, without being conscious of its extraordinary value'. The *Monthly Review* found it a 'violation of every principle and rule of poetry'.[21] The 'Ettrick Shepherd' was often portrayed as an unrefined prodigy, especially in *Blackwood's Magazine*'s 'Noctes Ambrosianae' sketches which ran between 1822 and 1835, largely the work of 'Christopher North' (Professor John Wilson). Like Robert Southey's *The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets* (1831), the 'Noctes' assume peasant poets should know their place. Irrational and ingenuous, the Shepherd is a 'Wild Huntsman' of the Forest' (IV, p. 24), who confesses:

> I hae little or nae knowledge at my finger-ends, or my tongue-tip either—it lies a' in my brain and in my heart. When, at times, the ideas come flashing out, my een are filled wi' fire—and when the emotions come flowin up, wi' water...like bees obeyin their instincks, that lead them, without chart or compass, to every nook in the wilderness where blaws a family o' heather-bells. (III, pp. 240–1)[22]

'The Shepherd' objects to bracketing Scottish and English peasant poets:

> Where wull you find in a' England siccan Poets o' the people, the Peasantry, that is the Children o' the Soil, the bairns o' Bank and brae, as Robert Burns, Allan Kinningham, and Me?... Burns and Bloomfield indeed!... Kinningham and Clare indeed! (I, 218)

The 'Noctes', being widely read, did real damage to Hogg's reputation. As William Tennant (sometimes classed as a peasant poet himself, despite his university education) wrote, 'I see you in Blackwood, fighting and reaping a harvest of beautiful black eyes from the fists of Professor John Wilson'. His ungenteel persona probably cost Hogg the Royal Literary Society pension he desperately needed. In 1825 he summed up his feelings for Wilson to Blackwood: 'I have a strange indefinable sensation with regard to him, made up of a mixture of terror, admiration and jealousy, just such a sentiment as one deil might be supposed to have of another'. Maybe Hogg alludes to this relationship in 'The Brownie of the Black Haggs', when Lady Sprot of Wheelhope regard the creature Merodach 'with such a look as one fiend would cast on another'.[23] *Confessions of a Justified*

James Hogg

Sinner (1824) takes this image further.

The iconography of Hogg reinforces his image as 'Shepherd'. He is invariably dressed in the clothes of his profession; with the high forehead of genius, and the faraway look of someone touched by the Muse. There are similarities with some of the images of Clare, such as the William Hilton portrait of 1820, and more recently Tom Bates's sculptural cycle (see the sketch reproduced as a frontispiece to the present volume). There may be other parallels in representations of peasant poets. There is the rather flattering A. Croquis portrait of Hogg, and D. Maclise's drawing based on this. The William Nicholson portrait in the National Portrait Gallery of Scotland shows strong parallels with the Naismith Burns. John Watson Gordon painted Hogg for Blackwood with wilder hair and a more docile expression. The face is plumper, the suit more countrified: altogether what one might expect for the publisher of the 'Noctes'. Hogg exploited artistic possibilities himself with a 'mountain harp' seal.

Hogg often presented himself as 'a sort of natural songster without any other advantage on earth'.[24] This is not just exploitation of the image; Hogg seems to have genuinely rejoiced in his self-given title, 'king of the mountain and fairy school'. The Shepherd seems to have equated family pride (his grandfather, Will o' Phaup, was the last man in Ettrick to see the fairies) with points of contact between landscape and the Muse, a connection made in 'Kilmeny'. However, in 1813, Hogg wrote to the publisher Archibald Constable, in connection with the proposed 'traditionary tales': 'as I think the Ettrick Shepherd is rather become a hackneyed name and imagine that having gained a character as a bard is perhaps no commendation to a writer of prose tales I am determined to publish them under a fictitious title—*J.H. Craig, of Douglas*'. The proposal, however, was dropped; the 'Ettrick Shepherd' was too commercially viable for 'traditionary' matters.[25]

In *Queen Hynde* (1825), an epic with comic interludes, Hogg attacked his grudging critics, presenting himself as 'Nature's own rude untutor'd child' (I, verse 106). The narrator hates:

> all those who sew
> Their faith unto some stale review;
> That ulcer of our mental store,
> The very dregs of manly lore;
> Bald, brangling, brutal, insincere;
> The bookman's venal gazetteer;
> Down with the trash, and every gull
> That gloats upon their garbage dull! (I, verse 192)

If this continues, 'Then must I from my patrons sever, / And give my darlings up for ever' (I, verse 197). Contemporary reactions to the fantastic *Hynde* were mixed; perhaps because of such passages. The *Westminster Review* proclaimed:

> This poem, as it is called on the title-page, seemd to have been inspired by insolence and whisky-punch... as an experiment intended to ascertain how far the English public will allow itself to be insulted, and as an attempt to introduce into our language certain peculiarities of pronunciation, which have hitherto been confined to the polite gentlemen, who digest their lucubrations in the obscure pot-houses of the modern Athens.[26]

Neither was Hogg to be taken seriously as an innovatory writer, as witnessed by the poor reception of his masterpiece, the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).[27] So too the mock-epic poem, *The Russiade* (1822), passed almost unnoticed. Its deliberate doggerel, drawing on precedents like *Don Juan* (1819–24), attacks the romantic notion of poet as prophet.

The Russiade opens by promising, within the burghal context of Selkirk, 'A song of sooth and sober sadness, / Of matchless might and motley madness' (lines 1–2). Hogg deflates the 'burly suitors' with comic rhyme: 'Though galled by darts, by horses trode on, / They bore their standard off from Flodden' (lines 20–21). Hogg enters the story self-consciously:

> Well then;—as all old tales began,
> "In Selkirk once there lived a man;"
> But such a man! Ah! shall we ever
> behold his like again? No, never!
> His name was John; his trade, 'tis true,
> Was boots and shoes to shape and sew:
> my muse has so much cant about her—
> In short, he was a Selkirk sutor (verse 5)

Claiming classical status, Hogg impishly invokes the 'Genius of Virgil': 'That men may read, though not admire me' (line 51). It transpires John (Hume) is not the hero but the tale-teller; any objection to digression is anticipated:

"But, Muse, you promised me a story,
Leave off your prosing, I implore ye...

Well, well, my master, I obey thee:
Where left I off my story, pray thee?
But 'tis so good and so sublime,
I'll tell it o'er a second time. (verses 21–2)

The reader enters another narrative layer. The tale proper features a mighty Mercian hero:

His name was Russell; but in sport,
Or else because his name was short,
Men called him Russ. (lines 255–7)

An anti-chivalric figure, like Charlie Scott in *The Three Perils of Man* (1822), Russ fathers children to two sisters and faces a lynch mob. He rides three miles to a damsel's cottage, spending a day and night in none-too-subtly-euphemistic, 'raptures of supreme delight'. The mob, in pursuit, seek to boil Russ 'In caldron of offensive oil' (lines 356), recalling the Earl of Soulis's legendary boiling in lead. Confronted by religious and lay people, Russ chooses an unusual weapon:

It was a lean and sordid priest,
That chanced among his feet to lie,
Not dead, but in extremity.

Him by the heels he roughly drew,
And soon in air his reverence flew
With rapid whirl, and broken howls,
Pouring destruction on their souls. (lines 422–8)

'Dame Venus' aids Russ; a voluptuous alternative to the ethereal guides of 'Kilmeny' and *Pilgrims of the Sun* (1815). They fly through 'Breadalbane's deepest dell' to 'dismal shades below'; a journey recalling Thomas the Rhymer's. Venus loses her breath as Russ 'Clasped his huge fists around her bosom' (line 537); they fly to a Valhalla style heaven where the narrator is pleased with his description: 'Well done, my Muse! by that same rule, /Virgil's a prosing drivelling fool' (lines 573–6).

As they ascend, the 'rarefied air makes Russ 'scarified':

Russ saw his sinful countryman
Beneath his burden growing wan,
Who to the moon was whipped up one day,
For stealing sticks on a Sunday.
He saw, besides, an iron gate,
At which a hungry colt did wait;
Over the spikes his nose was lying,
And Russell thought he whiles was neighing.
The new moon glowed in all her charms,
Yet clasped the old moon in her arms,
Much like himself and lovely dame:
All this he saw, then off they came. (lines 621–32)

The man in the moon, punished for breaking the Sabbath, is a traditional motif and the moon is associated with love, death, and numskulls; connotations which suggest a moral undercurrent. Significantly, the planet Venus is sometimes land of the dead.[28] 'Sly Venus' makes Russ fear 'the effects of female charms' and as the pair come to the tide Russ feels light and pure-breathed. The reader is enthralled, 'But here my Muse her breath must draw, / before she sing what Russell saw' (lines 687–8). The abrupt ending is fitting for this 'fragment'; Hogg implicitly mocks those who suspected his songs' authenticity in the *Minstrelsy* and elsewhere. The piece parodies the visionary tradition of Ramsay and Burns, alluding to the *Divine Comedy* too. It is, equally, a cautionary tale against rash love-making. This is virtuoso Hogg but it was not acknowledged as such. Later works like *A Queer Book* (1832) revert to the ballads and lyrics expected of a peasant poet, albeit with personalised distortions.

The Shepherd image long persisted. To Thomas Thomson, Hogg's editor and biographer, Hogg was 'the only poetical shepherd of note which as yet Scotland or England had produced'. Henry Shanks's *The Peasant Poets of Scotland* (1881), classed Burns and Hogg as Scotland's two greatest peasant poets. Even as late as 1954 Rayner Unwin in *The Rural Muse* refers to Hogg as 'a truly unsophisticated peasant-poet'. Insidiously, I believe, Hogg was a catalytic figure: his treatment, and reactions to it, provided a model for later peasant poets like Janet Hamilton (1795–1873), 'the weaver poet' William Thom (1798–1848) and 'Surfaceman' Alexander Anderson (1845–1909).[29]

There has even been an (admittedly intermittent) cult of Hogg, modelled on Burns's. Its places of pilgrimage include the memorials of Ettrickhall, Yarrow and Ettrick Churchyard; its rituals are Hogg Suppers. At the Edinburgh Burns Supper of 23 February 1819, Wilson's toast to 'Rabbie' termed Hogg—the guest of honour—

Burns's 'only worthy successor' to 'the spirit of their station'. During Hogg's 1832 visit to London a dinner was held on 25 January; two of Burns's sons were present, and Hogg brewed punch in Burns's bowl. At an 1834 Peebles dinner in his honour, Hogg claimed that, as Burns's successor, if he had a son born on 25 January, the child would be the best poet of all.[30] Suppers in Yarrow marked the centenary of Hogg's birth and the 150th anniversary of his death.

However Hogg has gradually transcended his image as 'Ettrick Shepherd'. Mrs Garden, Hogg's daughter, refuted the 'Noctes' stereotype and George Douglas's biography in the 'Famous Scot' series (1899) asserts: 'it is not only misleading but unjust'. Edith Batho's *The Ettrick Shepherd* (1927) was an important reassessment, and in 1927 T.E. Welby produced, for the first time since the original, an unexpurgated *Confessions*. This was vitally important in allowing Hogg's work to be appreciated. In 1947, André Gide's preface to a new *Confessions* treated Hogg, at long last, as a writer of international stature. John Carey's edition of the *Confessions* in 1969 continued the re-evaluation. As respectful editions by modern editors like Douglas Mack, Douglas Gifford and David Groves replace the bowdlerised Victorian texts, the work can speak for itself.[31] Hogg, like Clare, is finally taking his place as a great writer deserving of celebration.

In conclusion, it should be remembered that Clare, whose Scottish influences included James Beattie and James Thomson, was familiar with prototype Scottish peasant poets. Clare admired Allan Ramsay and, in 1819, the 'Northamptonshire peasant' claimed he emulated Burns's 'Manner of Expressing his home spun thoughts'. I'm aware, too, that some of Clare's later poems are in Scots; and that his grandfather was Scottish; perhaps Clare's Scottish counterparts provided not only parallels but poetic models. There is, for example, Clare's 'Coy Maidens o' Drysail', partly based on Burns' 'Hey ca' thro', which names several Fife fishing villages.[32] Perhaps Clare found equal inspiration in Hogg's *The Queen's Wake*, that I mentioned earlier. It would be extremely fruitful to explore links between self taught poets from both sides of the border. If I may end with a suggestion, would it be possible to arrange a joint meeting of the Clare and Hogg Societies to explore such issues more fully?

NOTES

1. David Masson, *College Education and Self-Education: A Lecture Delivered in University College, London, October 17th, 1854* (London, n.d.), p. 15.
2. See James Hogg, *Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 29.
3. See *The Scots Magazine*, 72 (August 1819), pp. 604–8. Sheridan's remarks are quoted by Robert Crawford in *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), p. 23.
4. Mackenzie's article is reprinted in *Robert Burns: the Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald A. Low (London, 1974), pp. 67–71. All references to Burns's *Letters* are to *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. G. Ross Roy (two volumes, Oxford, 1985). Burns's *Poems* are cited from Robert Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (London, 1969). See also 'On a dog of Lord Eglintoun', 'A Fragment—On Glenriddel's Fox breaking his chain' and 'On the death of Echo, a Lap-Dog' (*Poems*, 622, 527, 416).
5. [James Montgomery], *Eclectic Review*, v (May 1809), 393–410, quoted in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 211–14.
6. Quoted in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 419–20; Alexander Peterkin, *A Review of the Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1815), pp. xvi, li, lvii, xxxi, x, lxviii–lxix, lxxxiii.
7. *The Essential Clare*, ed. Carolyn Kizer (Hopewell, NJ, 1992), p. 3. See 'Memoir of the Life of James Hogg', *The Mountain Bard* (Edinburgh, 1807), pp. xiii–xiv, reprinted in *Memoirs of The Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (New York, 1972).
8. 1807 'Memoir', pp. xiii–xiv.
9. See James Hogg, *Scottish Pastorals* (1801), reprinted ed. Elaine Petrie (Stirling, 1988); 1807 'Memoir', p. xviii.
10. See *The Journal of Walter Scott, ed. W.E.K. Anderson* (Oxford, 1972).
11. National Library of Scotland, MS 3875, f. 172.
12. *The Athenaeum* (Jan 1831), 7, Review of 'The Songs of James Hogg' .
13. *The Monthly Review*, 95 (1821), 429; Allan Cunningham, 'Hogg', *The Athenaeum* (Oct 1833), 770.
14. D.M. Moir (Delta), *The Poetical Works of the Past Half Century*, third edition (Edinburgh, 1856), p. 290.
15. *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818), reprinted ed. Douglas Mack (Edinburgh, 1976); *The Three Perils of Man* (1822), reprinted ed. Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh, 1989).
16. James Hogg, *Songs* (Edinburgh, 1831), pp. 51–55.
17. 'The Lark' was first published in *A Border Garland* (1819). It is reprinted in *Songs*, pp. 15–16, as 'The Skylark'.
18. *Songs*, p. 51.
19. See James Hogg, *Selected Poems and Songs*, ed. David Groves (Edinburgh, 1986).
20. Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 43.
21. *Edinburgh Review*, 24 (1814–15), 162; *Monthly Review*, 88 (1814), 435.
22. All citations from John Wilson, *Noctes Ambrosianae* (four volumes, Edinburgh, 1863).
23. National Library of Scotland, MS. 4014, f. 287; 'Brownie of the Black Haggs' in *Blackwood's Magazine*, XXIV (1818), 489–96, reprinted in *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Short Stories*, ed. Ian Murray (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 1–15.
24. 'Memoir of the Life of James Hogg', *The Mountain Bard* (Edinburgh, 1821), p. xxxi.

25. National Library of Scotland, MS. 7200, f. 203.
26. *Westminster Review*, 3 (April 1825), 531.
27. On the contemporary reception of *Confessions*, see Gifford, Ch. 5.
28. See Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen, 1956), items E481.8.3 and E481.8.2. Types and motifs involving the moon include A.751.1.1. *Man in moon has punishment for burning brush on Sunday* related to C631. *Tabu: Breaking the Sabbath* and C950. *Person carried to other world for breaking tabu* and E501.3.6. *Wild huntsman wanders for hunting on Sunday.* Perhaps the mare is related to the A755.4.3. *Moon's phases caused by animals gnawing at the edge.* There is D1812.5.1.5.1. *New moon with the old moon in her arms as sign of storm.* The moon and stupidity are associated in AT1334 *The Local Moon*, AT1335 *The Eaten Moon* and 1335A *Rescuing the Moon* and AT1336 *Diving for Cheese.* Rhymes include 'New moon, true moon, / Tell unto me, / If [naming her favourite lover] will marry me': see Robert Chambers, *The Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, new edition (Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 334. See also Z127.1 *Venus as sin personified* E481.8.3 *Venus (planet) as land of dead.*
29. Thomas Thomson, 'Life of the Author' in James Hogg, *The Works of the Ettrick Shepherd*, 1865, reprinted (New York, 1973), p. ix; Rayner Unwin, *The Rural Muse: Studies in the Peasant Poetry of England* (London, 1954), p. 115.
30. Lockhart (1977), pp. 39–40; Hall, quoted in Garden, pp. 204–5. Hogg's claim to share Burns's birthday has been refuted. However others claimed common natal details with Burns. In a letter to Robert Chambers in 1838, George Thomson claimed to have been born, like Burns, in 1759; the Dunfermline register of births shows Thomson born in 1757. see Garden, pp. 2–4; J. Cuthbert Hadden, *George Thomson, The Friend of Burns* (London, 1908), p. 1.
31. André Gide, 'Introduction' to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner [1947]*, trans. Dorothy Bussy and reprinted (London, 1959), p. xii.
32. See *Later Poems*, II, 843. I am grateful to David Powell for drawing my attention to Clare's poem. For Clare and Scottish writers see also Ian Bowman, 'Aiblins—John Clare?', *Lallans*, 26 (Whitsuntid, 1986), pp. 19–24.